

# Looping Willow Grove

Story & photos by Tracy Beard

## Exercise, explore river countryside

Cycling is terrific exercise and a fantastic way to get around. Cowlitz County is a fun place to explore on your bike, whether you prefer to ride solo, with friends or as a family.

In 2021 a team consisting of Complete Streets Advisory Committee members, residents, volunteers and city staff drafted a master plan to expand the current bike routes and walking trails in Longview. As I await the completion of this collaborative project, one of my favorite places to ride is the loop around Willow Grove.

Willow Grove Park, located on the Columbia River west of Longview on Willow Grove Road, is easy to find and affords plenty of parking. Leave your car at either the boat launch or the picnic area, unload the bikes and take a left to follow my path out of the parking lot, heading west on Willow Grove Road.

There is very little traffic on the roadway, so you can journey along at a leisurely speed, or pick up the pace for a great workout. Be aware there is often a police officer with a radar gun on the main section of the road. The speed limit is 35 miles per hour, and although you may get away with speeding on your bike, you will not escape a ticket speeding in your car.

The loop is just over six miles long, and the elevation change throughout the ride is a mere 13 feet. Right out of the gate you will see one of my favorite houses on the right, hidden amongst trees. I love the black stone chimney. As you follow the road curving right, you can see a large farm with a round pen. Horses and cows are often grazing in this and nearby pastures.

Extensive gardens with greenhouse hoop covers are on the right, and the slough quietly flows along on the left. I have spied ducks, egrets, blue herons and turtles

on my travels through this section. Look for the poles with platforms in the slough; these are available for birds to nest out of harm's way.

Throughout the remainder of the ride you will tour past estate-like homes with manicured lawns, smaller houses with charming yard art, farms with cows, horses and chickens, various gardens, and several houseboats. Keep an eye out for peek-a-boo views of the Columbia River on the left in between the real estate.

The Port of Longview, which celebrated 100 years of progress in 2020, purchased the park in 2014 and spent millions of dollars on renovations for the community. Plenty of barbecues are available, grassy areas and beachfront sand, and the picnic structures and bathrooms recently received a makeover.

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The most challenging part of this ride is the last stretch back to the park along the river. The afternoon wind makes riding more strenuous, so I like to go in the morning and stay at the park for a picnic lunch. Make the following fish recipe

at home and put it in a thermos or in your car crockpot to keep it warm until lunch or bring something to barbeque at the park. Although alcohol is not allowed at the park, I have included one of my favorite summer cocktail recipes.



The sand should make for a soft landing.



Tracy Beard writes about luxury and adventure travel, traditional and trendy fine dining and libations for regional, national and international magazines. She is in her seventh year as CRR's "Out & About" columnist. She lives in Longview, Wash.



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## PROVISIONS ALONG THE TRAIL



### Tasty Corn Salad

- ½ bag fire-roasted frozen corn – thawed
- 2 cups cherry tomatoes – cut in half
- 1 ripe avocado – diced
- ½ can of black olives – cut in half
- 4 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- 1 chipotle chili – seeded and minced
- 1 ½ tablespoons fresh lime juice
- 1 tablespoon honey
- Salt and pepper to taste

Mix oil, lime juice, chipotle, honey, salt and pepper in a small container until blended. Place corn, tomatoes, avocado and olives in a bowl. Toss with dressing.

### Summer Fish Tacos

- 2 tilapia loins
- 1 teaspoon seasoning salt
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 4 taco-sized flour tortillas
- ½ head romaine lettuce or white cabbage – chopped into thin slices
- 1 ripe mango – sliced lengthwise
- 1 ripe avocado – sliced lengthwise
- 1/3 cup sour cream
- 1 chipotle – seeded and minced
- 1 lime – cut into wedges

Mix chipotle in sour cream and place in the refrigerator for a few hours. Sprinkle the tilapia with seasoned salt. Heat oil and cook the fish on both sides until it flakes easily with a fork, approximately 5 minutes. Keep warm. Wash and chop lettuce. Slice the mango, avocado and lime. Cut the tilapia lengthwise. Warm the tortillas in a hot pan until hot and pliable. Lay ½ tilapia on the tortilla and dress with the sour cream mix, avocado, mango and lettuce. This recipe makes four tacos.



### Strawberry Basil Margarita

- 4 ounces tequila
- 2 1/2 ounces Cointreau
- 1 1/2 ounces real lime juice
- 1 1/2 ounces sweet and sour mix
- 8-10 fresh ripe strawberries

- 10 basil leaves
- 6-8 ice cubes
- Pour all ingredients into a blender and mix until smooth. This recipe makes 2-3 margaritas depending on the size of your glass.

